

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION TRANSPORTATION 2035

GENERAL FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED FROM RANDOM PHONE POLL

MAY 7, 2008

SOLANO COUNTY: CITY OF FAIRFIELD

Planning for future transportation needs: All of the nine focus group participants in Solano County reported that they rely almost exclusively on their automobiles for transportation. Further, several of the participants commute to San Francisco or the peninsula for work, and the challenge of this commute heavily influenced the discussion of future transportation needs. Over the course of the discussion, it also became clear that several of the participants feel that Solano County has been neglected in regional transportation plans. Additionally, many of the participants expressed concern over how the rising cost of gasoline would affect their neighborhoods given that many of their friends and family commute over long distances to work.

The participants unanimously agreed that their local streets and highways require extensive maintenance, and local potholes had even damaged two of the participants' cars. A majority of the participants indicated that maintenance of existing systems should take priority in planning for the future. Several participants commented that our current streets and highways are an asset that should be protected, and that delayed maintenance would only increase the danger of driving and the expense of future work. In this group, contrary to the group in San Francisco, the emphasis on maintenance was almost exclusively on the maintenance of streets and highways.

Maintain the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	6
Build new roads and add more bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	3

In line with their responses to the above question, 8 participants indicated that they would spend up to 50 percent or more of the \$30 billion dollar budget on maintenance of existing systems. In comparison, only one participant reported that she would spend up to 25 percent.

up to 25% (\$7.5 billion dollars)	1
up to 50% (\$15 billion dollars)	5
up to 75% (\$22.5 billion dollars)	1
100% (\$30 billion dollars)	2

A majority of the participants mentioned that they would expand public transportation systems when asked to describe the use of any funds that were not allocated to maintenance. Several of the participants specifically mentioned the need for light rail access to San Francisco and the rest of the Bay area. In contrast to the Sonoma County participants, these participants reported that

additional bike lanes and walking paths would not serve the transportation needs of their community.

Congestion relief: Given the priority of maintenance projects among this group, it was interesting that a majority of the participants reported that traffic congestion would be “Somewhat” or “Much worse” in the future if funds from the \$30 billion dollar budget were not available for new transit system projects. Several of the participants argued that residents prefer to drive and this preference will not change in the future.

Much better	1
Somewhat better	1
No change	1
Somewhat worse	3
Much worse	3

Two of the participants indicated that spending transportation funds on the highway system should take priority in plans to relieve traffic congestion. Again, these participants argued that the community’s reliance on driving would not change rapidly in the future. In contrast, five participants reported that public transit options should take priority, and the remaining two participants could not decide between the options. Similar to earlier comments, the participants in support of public transit options mentioned the need for light rail service from their community to San Francisco.

Highway systems to relieve traffic congestion, including ramp metering, high-occupancy toll lanes, etc.	2
Public transit options, including rail and buses to provide alternatives to driving.	5
Walking paths and bicycle lanes to provide alternatives to driving	0
DK/NA	2

Two of the participants carpool, and they were strongly opposed to allowing commercial trucks to use carpool lanes for a fee. To reduce the traffic congestion caused by business and manufacturer transport, the participants favored options that would take these trucks off roads – either by limiting the hours of travel, encouraging the use of rail or ferries, or building dedicated truck lanes.

Keep trucks out of the peak commuter hours	3
Allow smaller trucks to use carpool lanes during congested periods for a fee	0
Encourage more cargo deliveries be made by rail or ferries	2
Build exclusive truck lanes supported by trucking fees	3

Provide more truck parking in commercial business areas	0
DK/NA	1

Attitudes toward focused growth: The participants were somewhat divided in their attitudes toward focused growth. Six participants suggested that communities should receive additional transportation funds when they build along public transit lines, whereas three participants argued that such a program would be unfair toward communities with a different vision for their community. Several participants also argued that people want to drive, and will continue to drive, and transit-oriented communities run counter to residents' current preferences.

Funds to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines	6
Funds evenly to communities regardless of where they are planning to build homes	3

Providing transit access: The questions regarding discounted transit fares yielded interesting results. Several of the participants argued that public transportation systems should be able to support themselves with fares, and that the fares should not be diverted to other transportation agencies, programs, or projects. On the other hand, many of the participants suggested that public transportation should be free to all riders in the Bay area. Otherwise, eight of the participants favored maintaining some system of discounted fares, but the group was undecided on the criteria that should be used to determine the riders that qualify for a discount. The participants who were opposed to revising the system to one based on household income perceived this allocation of funds to be outside the charter of a transportation agency, and argued that this service would be the responsibility of another agency.

Emissions reduction: The discussion on reducing automobile emissions supported the responses to the questions on congestion relief. A majority of the participants favored reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, whereas three participants favored making it easier to drive around the Bay area. In the discussion that followed, the participants largely agreed that bottlenecks should be addressed and congested sections of highway in the region should be redesigned.

Reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, such as public transit, bicycling, walking, etc.	6
Reducing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow to make it easier to drive around the Bay area	3

When asked to think of other transportation projects and programs that could be used to reduce automobile emissions, participants suggested the following: carpool lanes should be expanded and their use should be strictly enforced; public transportation systems should be expanded to make the option viable to more residents of the Bay area; and programs should subsidize or reward the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles.

Final thoughts on maintenance versus expansion projects: The discussion had the overall effect of slightly decreasing the importance of maintenance over new projects – 3 of the 9 participants reported that they would allocate less of the \$30 billion dollar budget to

maintenance, and this time no participants were willing to spend all of the funds on maintenance. Although maintenance remained a strong priority, participants allocated funds to projects that would increase coverage of public transit systems, reduce traffic congestion, and reduce automobile emissions. Since several of the participants had emphasized that they prefer to drive, and that they plan on continuing to rely on driving in the future, other participants discussed the need for programs that will help change current transportation behaviors in the Bay area.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	2
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	4
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	3
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

Similar to the group in Sonoma County, the participants were divided on the revenue measures and fees that could be used to raise additional funds for transportation projects.